

The Cask of Chianti

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The Cask of Chianti

by [Cadaverish](#)

Summary

Will becomes ever more ensnared by the haunted house on the hill. When it is beset by a group of rude teenagers, he decides to do whatever it takes to keep his new home, and the ghost within, for himself.

Notes

So. Uh. Does anyone remember this series? I promised more and I did mean it, I'm sorry it took so long! Law school has been demanding my time ever more arduously, I can only apologize for the delay. Please heed the warnings I don't want anybody to have a bad day!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Will paced up and down the kitchen chewing on his knuckles.

Bedelia was right that the police would not be pleased to find someone squatting in the house on the hill. The crime scene seal had been removed from the door but they could get him on trespassing at the very least.

“She doesn’t get it!” Will complained, punctuating by smacking the flat of his hand on the countertop. “Fuck,” he breathed, jamming his hands onto his narrow hips, “what am I gonna tell the cops?” Will felt pressure on his jaw and turned his head towards the window. Dr. Lecter was standing in front of him, nearly pinning him to the counter. Will instinctively turned his head back to face where he would be, and couldn’t help the twinge of disappointment that he couldn’t see anyone there.

Will felt Lecter’s hand on the back of his neck and followed obediently into the office. His duffle bag was there, open to show his notebooks, his hodge podge hardware kit, his spare candles, and faintly visible underneath everything, the Ouija board he had bought at the antique store so long ago. Will couldn’t say why he was convinced that’s what Lecter wanted, but he knelt beside the bag and withdrew the box containing the board and sat cross legged in the middle of the office.

He pulled out the board and the planchette and sat with his fingers on the little bit of wood waiting, but nothing happened. “Oh,” he said aloud realizing what he’d forgotten, “uh, Dr. Lecter if you’re here, please speak to me.” Immediately the piece skittered across the board. Will’s fingers felt glued to it and his whole body jerked along with the planchette as it moved straight to “hello”.

Will shifted his wait to follow the movements of the planchette on the board more easily and in quick succession Lecter spelled out: WAIT ILL HANDLE HER SLEEP. Will supposed Dr. Lecter resented the fact that there was no apostrophe on the Ouija board.

Will sat back and lifted his hands from the wooden piece staring down at the board. “I guess I’m supposed to say goodbye here,” he said to the empty room, “but they never say what to do if you want to be haunted.”

Something cold brushed against Will’s earlobe and he smiled reflexively.

All at once, Will felt at peace. He stood and walked calmly upstairs, got into bed, and was fast asleep by the time his head hit the pillow. When he awoke, a sleek android phone rested on his nightstand. Will pulled up the lock screen and saw the background was a picture of Alana, smiling in the sunlight. It was definitely Bedelia’s phone then. He wondered if she was still alive, and then he wondered if he cared.

Rising, Will got to work on the windows in the kitchen. As he worked, he thought about how to handle Bedelia more permanently. Assuming she was still alive, she’d have access to another phone within the day. Will couldn’t undo all the repairs he’d done on the house, any visiting police with access to the photographs in Price or Fred’s case files would know somebody had been here, but he could make sure they didn’t know who that had been.

Will dug out a pair of gloves he'd used while handling the raw panes of glass, and started wiping down the house. Every window, every counter, and every bit of the bed in Dr. Lecter's room were wiped for prints. Will changed the sheets for a set in the linen closet and shoved the used set in his bag to be watched back on campus. He finished up by wiping down the door knobs, gathered the rest of his things, and turned to leave for campus.

Will stood with his bag slung over his shoulder in the entryway and felt momentarily overwhelmed. Where would he be if he hadn't found this place? His hand gravitated to the bite mark on his hip. "Thank you," he told the empty house, though he wasn't at all sure Dr. Lecter could hear him while the sun was out.

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When he got back to campus, he took the battery out of Bedelia's phone, removed the sim card, and threw both away. Then he wiped the phone down and tucked it into an envelope and dropped that into campus mail with her address written on it. She would replace the missing parts in time, but hopefully would make her think twice before interfering in the future.

Will finished the first draft of his thesis over the next few weeks, and it was the easiest writing he'd ever done. The words felt dragged out of him almost faster than he could type them. Between his end-of-semester workload and Bedelia's threat, Will couldn't return to the house. The absence of the house and its spectral occupant felt like a physical weight. The weight got heavier every day he couldn't go back to the house. His thesis professor pulled him aside a few days before finals began and asked him if he had been eating enough, if he was feeling okay. Will opened his mouth to answer that yes of course he was, when she asked him "Did somebody die?"

Will couldn't hold in a laugh at that. It bubbled out of him and he laughed until his sides hurt. His professor folded her arms and watched him looking more than a little worried. "No," he told her, "no. Just, um," he fumbled with the hem of his shirt trying to come up with an excuse for his outburst, "I was just. Um. My granddad, you know," Will was pretty sure his paternal grandfather was still alive somewhere, "we thought he was going to pass, he um, he went through a rough patch. But he's uh, fine," his voice trailed up at the end and he slapped a hand over his mouth hoping to play it off as an almost sob rather than a question mark.

Will's professor patted his shoulder awkwardly and told him she was happy his grandfather was alright. Will all but ran from the class building with his backpack slapping against his back. Class ended and Will camped out in the library to study for finals. When he got sick of studying, he found books on plumbing and he combed through google.

He didn't go back to his apartment.

He knew he couldn't get the electricity back on in Lecter's house without drawing attention to his presence, but patching up the water shouldn't be a problem. He was willing to bet Lecter was on well water and willing to bet he wouldn't need power to get the sinks running again, with cold water at least. He wasn't sure how getting the water heater going again was going to work, but that was a problem for another time.

It wasn't that Will needed the water, he hauled the water he used to wash and drink in large jugs in the back of his car and it worked fine, but he felt compelled to restore the house. Sealing the windows had been about warmth, but he couldn't deny the house looked right with its façade that much restored. It would be even better with the floors and water restored.

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Will turned up for his first final and fumbled in his pocket for a pen that still had some ink. His fingers met a smooth piece of wood and he pulled it out, brow furrowed, to discover the Ouija planchette had somehow ended up in his pocket. They weren't the trousers he had been wearing when he had last spoken with Lecter.

Will finished the final with the planchette gripped in his left hand while his right hand went on writing. After the final, Will found a spare bit of string and threaded it through the hole in the center of the planchette and slipped the loop over his head. It hung around his neck and rested over his breastbone. Will looked at himself in the grimy bathroom mirror, and touched his bite mark.

Between the planchette and the mark, his ribs stood out in stark relief. Maybe he really hadn't been eating enough.

Turning, he looked at his back over his shoulder. It had healed cleanly without any infection or sesame oil affecting it, and his skin was as smooth as it had ever been. He rubbed at the skin he could reach, missing the pull and sting of the scabs.

Impulsively, Will pressed a kiss to the planchette and whispered "I miss you." Nothing happened, but he didn't really expect anything to happen. As Will turned to leave, something caught at the edge of his vision. He turned to the bathroom mirror with his heart in his throat.

The lights in the library background flickered and Will squeezed the planchette until his hand started hurting.

But then the lights came back on, and the mirror showed only his pale chest, the lines of his ribs, and the raised bite on his hip. Will stepped back up to the sink, trying not to feel too disappointed, when he saw the hand print. Clear as day, in the exact middle of the mirror. It was too smudged to discern pattern of arches and whorls or whether they matched the set from the new mirror he'd put in Dr. Lecter's bedroom, but Will felt with absolute certitude he had been visited and smiled broadly.

He kissed the planchette again, tugged on his shirt, and left the bathroom still smiling.

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In the four day gap between his last two finals, Will felt the ache of being away from the house like a living thing, and opted to take a break from studying with the last of the 1946 journal.

May 30, 1946

I have persuaded Lt. Cpt. Brown to forsake his barbed wire. He has agreed, instead, to

meditate the harm he would do to a body if he were free from repercussion, be it medical, legal, or spiritual. If Lt. Cpt. Brown noticed that I didn't specify whose body, he did not remark on it.

It is best he stop thinking of himself as an outlet for his frustrations.

June 5, 1946

Lt. Cpt. Brown came to his appointment with me in tears today, saying that he dreamt of shooting the man who lives across the street from him. He has a very guarded face, it is difficult to glean his emotion from looking into his eyes alone, but I thought I saw fear in them as he recited the dream to me. In the dream, he kills his neighbor. He says he's been having it for weeks. One would expect shame, so I suspect there is a component he has yet to reveal to me.

I told him such dreams were very common and very natural, and had to repeat myself several times before I was confident that he had heard me, even if he did not yet believe me. I set my hand on his shoulder and found them tense and hard as stone.

The Lt. Cpt. has eyes of the darkest brown.

June 9, 1946

Lt. Cpt. Brown knocked on my door early this morning. He wasn't crying this time, but looked pale and drawn. It was sad to see in a man who normally has such an easy, loose posture. He stared at me, I had yet to be dressed beyond night clothes and a dressing gown, and then apologized and turned to leave.

I took his elbow, and brought him inside, and made tea for us. It shows how little I was thinking, I know Lt. Cpt. Brown is a coffee drinker and he barely touched his tea. He sat in my kitchen chair with his hands clasped between his knees and head bowed almost as if he were in a confessional.

He explained his dream to me like this: His neighbor is standing in the yard across the street from him. Lt. Cpt. Brown sees him from the porch. He doesn't even pause, he grabs the hammer that's lying near by, walks across the street and beats his neighbor to the ground. Blood sprays everywhere, fountaining up every time he swings the hammer but he keeps going.

The Lt. Cpt. told me that the dream is absolutely silent save for the sound of the hammer striking flesh which he described as "wet."

I asked him if he had this dream while he was awake or asleep and his gaze snapped to mine suspiciously. He left without answering.

June 18

Today I was visited by a young man named Theodore Budge.

He told me he worked for a hotel downtown as a bellhop and hoped, someday, to play for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. He asked me if I was surprised that a black man had classical violin training.

I said I was surprised to have a patient who seemed to be in excellent spirits.

He said that his good mood was not the norm that his moods seemed to swing like a pendulum and that, when he was in one of his bad moods, he scared the customers at the hotel. He smoothed his hands over his slacks and asked if I might assist him with some preventative action before he was fired. I assured him I would do my best and penciled him in for twice monthly appointments.

-x-

At the end of finals, Will could stand the waiting no longer.

Returning to the house felt like walking into a warm house on a bitterly cold day, Will smiled because, in this case, it was almost always colder inside the house than it was outside, even now in the beginning of winter. Now he was armed with brushes to clean out the chimney. If he was going to camp out in a house with no electricity for the winter, he would need to get the fireplace up and running. It was nearly impossible to see the house from the ridge above or the access road, so Will thought that the risk of smoke being seen by a passerby was an acceptable one. The doctor's bedroom shared a chimney with his office on the first floor and Will hoped that the old insulation, with the windows repaired, would be sufficient enough that he would only be chilly instead of freezing in the old house.

It was a bit different cleaning the big brick chimney than it had been cleaning his father's chimney, but Will felt reasonably sure he wouldn't be at risk of self-immolating when he kicked up a fire that evening.

He was stacking firewood into the maw of the hearth when he heard a tap on the window. Straightening up, Will looked over his shoulder to see Bedelia du Maurier resplendent in shiny black leggings and a long black coat with a high collar. She looked contrite, one arm folded across her stomach and the other hand wrapped around whatever pendant hung from her necklace. With the windows replaced, the only entrances were the doors.

Will waved a hand to get Bedelia to meet him by the front door and found it locked from the inside. "Guess you can move around a little during the day," he muttered, and couldn't hold back a crooked little smile. Will opened the door and stepped out, rather than inviting Bedelia in. If Dr. Lecter was up and about with the sun still up, he must be holding a mighty grudge, not that Will wasn't still a little peeved himself.

"Hey," he offered, though his tone invited caution. "Hey, Will," Bedelia replied, not meeting his eyes. Will jumped the broken steps leading up to the porch and strolled around to a section where the railing had broken away but the porch itself was strong, and hoisted himself onto it. Bedelia sat next to him.

"You look thin, Will," Bedelia starts out. She'd let the pendant go and Will saw that it was a chunk of something purple, maybe amethyst. "Lecter yells at me about that," Will lied.

"Does he?" Bedelia's eyebrows had shot up, nearly to her hairline.

Will nodded jerkily, his smile was genuinely fond, "he used to be a great cook, you know-"

“The cannibal?” Bedelia interrupted, Will leveled a look at her that suggested even Dr. Lecter wasn’t so bad as to feed other people meat. Bedelia made a sour face but looked away.

Will’d never lied to Bedelia, not about anything big, which must be why she was believing him so easily. He didn’t feel the slightest bit guilty. She didn’t understand what he’d found. She didn’t understand what Dr. Lecter’s meals had meant.

“It was the stress from finals,” Will continued firmly, “I couldn’t come back here and relax.”

“You feel relaxed here?” Bedelia asked, sounding alarmed, “Where Fred died? Where Price died?”

“At first I just wanted to make peace with what happened,” Will told her, slowly so it sounded like he was figuring it out as he spoke, “and I came to realize Dr. Lecter didn’t want to hurt me. He was scared,” Will internally winced as he said that, Lecter wasn’t going to like that one bit, but he had to make him relatable.

“He loved that house, Bedelia,” Will started again, “and there was a bunch of punk teenagers rummaging around in his stuff and trashing the place.” Will shrugged helplessly.

“I miss Price and Fred, of course I do, but I guess I just” he trailed off breathing into his knuckles and staring into the trees around the house, still holding on to the last of the autumn leaves, “I understand?”

He turned to look at her, one hip hanging off the porch, “sounds crazy, right?”

Bedelia hated that word. He knew what she would have to say before she said it: “No, Will, it doesn’t sound crazy.” Will bowed his head to hide his smile.

Bedelia went on, “I still don’t think this is the healthiest place to be spending your break,” she glanced over her shoulder furtively, her hand drifting inexorably upwards to grip the pendant, “spirits are unpredictable at the best of times.”

She fixed him with a look and added, “but I understand needing to deal with grief in your own way, and if needing to understand is your way, I guess it’s better than most.”

“Thanks, Bedelia.”

A breeze whipped through the trees around the house, tossing Bedelia’s corn-silk hair around her shoulders. She stood, tucking herself deeper into her jacket and burying her nose in the collar. “I better get back,” she murmured uneasily, “the sun’s going down.”

Will didn’t say anything.

“Be safe, okay?” she implored, turning back to him.

“Oh I’m perfectly safe, Bedelia,” Will assured her, almost believing himself.

Her eyes flicked to something over his shoulder, something in the window of the house. She looked pale. Abruptly, she wheeled around and strode off towards the road. Will huffed a

laugh through his nose and turned to go back inside. As he moved to the door, a glint of light caught his eye: a very familiar knife rested on the inside windowsill.

“Mean, Dr. Lecter,” Will chastised but his tone was warm. As he stepped into the front room, something drifted across the softness of his throat, the barest impression of fingertips.

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July 7, 1946

Lt. Cpt. Brown visited me today, as pale as new ash. He told me he hadn't slept in days, as several of his more exuberant neighbors had obtained a number of fireworks and had decided to hold repeat performances of their Independence Day show all week long.

Loud noises make him startle.

He said they'd startled him enough before he had gone to war but now it was just that much worse.

I'd remarked idly how rude it was of his neighbors to be making so much noise so late at night, and Lt. Cpt Brown surprised me by getting extremely angry in turn. He ranted against his neighbors for the rest of his hour, even going so far as to stand up and pace in my office. Although he made a point of mentioning the good people who lived around him and “got to get to work real early,” I couldn't help but think an attack of Shell Shock was much more severe than a short night's sleep.

At the end of the time, I asked him how he intended to resolve the conflict. He said he'd “dream up something” and I think his turn of phrase was not accidental.

July 13, 1946

Lt. Cpt. Brown tells me his neighborhood is much quieter now. He has developed an ache in his throat and ear from grinding his teeth.

July 21, 1946

I invited Matthew Brown to dinner.

August 2, 1946

Today I witnessed young Mr. Budge in one of his worse moods. He told me that he had been hired on to play in a jazz orchestra. At the time he had been promised it was classical and played “all the old masters”. He told me just because he was black didn't mean he wanted to “jive” and he glared out the window.

I asked him if he planned to stay, and he told me that he did because rent was due whether he got treated fairly or not, but continued on saying it wouldn't be quite so insulting if his fellow orchestra members had any talent.

I told him I suspected he was familiar with being the most talented man in the room and he smiled ruefully and said he was.

I told him it was a shame that orchestra selection was not a more democratic process. He looked thoughtful at that, and seemed in a better mood for the rest of the meeting.

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Will called up the browser on his phone, shading the screen from the light thrown by the now merrily crackling fire, and searched for jazz orchestra murders in Baltimore in 1946. He was not at all surprised when google returned a number of sensationalist news reports that reveled in the gory details of the string of murders.

Of course, none of them had been solved.

Staring at a flautist who had been strangled with cello strings, Will thought about Lt. Cpl. Matthew Brown. Lecter's story about Brown's barbed wire surcingle made him think about the web of cuts Lecter had carved into his back and the bite on his hip. Unconsciously, his free hand drifted to the bite mark.

Will stood, thinking about getting some work done on the house, and his head spun. He sat down heavily as his vision swam. He felt full of cotton, both too light to move and beyond the control of his own mind.

A feeling of calm settled over him so abruptly Will's breath caught. He stood, and walked briskly to his backs. He squatted and again Will's vision started to black out, but he didn't wobble, his stance was rock solid. As Will started to lose consciousness his hands went right on moving, searching through his back even though Will couldn't see a thing.

He came to in the kitchen, standing before the cutting board, his right hand moving methodically up and down through one of the apples he had brought with him. Experimentally, Will tried to stop the hand on the knife. Instead, the fingers on his left hand curled just a little further away from the blade.

Will's hands finished their task, leaving Will with a tidy pile of perfectly symmetrical slices. His right hand picked one up, and held it to his lips. Will obligingly took the slice between his teeth and ate it.

One by one, his hands fed him each slice of the apple. Somewhere around the middle Will's stomach abruptly gave a loud grumble and he realized how hungry he actually was. He laughed, "you are actually yelling at me for forgetting to eat," he remarked, remembering the lie he had spun for Bedelia. Lecter's breath puffed over his neck and Will felt fingers just barely there, trailing under the hem of his shirt.

"You could give me a grocery list," Will suggested, "we could cook." There was no light in the kitchen and the sun was nearly down, Will's eyes struggled for any movement, any sign to prove Dr. Lecter was there with him. He didn't dare turn around to look in the mirror.

Abruptly, Will was hauled up by a vice grip at his waist and pushed forwards, up and over the kitchen counter. The counters were high, and Will's toes could barely touch the tile with his torso flush to the countertop and his ass in the air. Will's fingers scrabbled at the counter, squeaking as they failed to find purchase.

Being a ghost must have had its perks, because Dr. Lecter didn't seem to need to use his arms to keep Will devastatingly pinned; Will could feel both of the good doctor's hands on his ass, pressed firmly into the meat of his cheeks, and then up and over his pelvis. His shirt slid up as Dr. Lecter's hands smoothed up his back on either side of his spine, and kept moving inexorably up his arms, forcing Will to straighten his elbows. Will wasn't sure how Dr. Lecter could reach his wrists, which had been forced to stretch straight out across the counter, if he was indeed standing behind Will, but then, Will isn't sure Dr. Lecter's body was obliged to conform to human anatomy either. He felt a sharp thrill at the thought.

Will stared at his wrists with his face mashed against the freezing marble, waiting for something to happen, then abruptly remembered what had happened with the medical bag and the knives. He shut his eyes. Immediately his shirt twisted like a living thing and knotted around his wrists binding them together. Will felt the strain of the position in his back and where the points of his hips met the edge of the marble, and however much he tried to relax his body the discomfort kept him on edge.

Dr. Lecter's teeth brushed over the prominent vertebra in Will's neck, first the barest graze, and then a sharp bite. Will could feel Dr. Lecter sucking hard on his skin and he whimpered and squirmed, kicking his feet ineffectually. Lecter moved down his back, sucking marks into each of the pointed vertebra. Will pictured the dotted line of violet that must now be working its way from neck to pelvis, and his mind flashed back to his mental picture of Matthew Brown and his surcingle.

The surcingle, probably some homemade contraption of barbed wire or something similar, would have cut and bruised at once. Matthew would probably have encouraged the bruising and discoloration. Dr. Lecter had made his way to Will's lumbar, where the vertebra weren't nearly so apparent and was working his way by math or by feel. Will thought about rocking himself on the flagstones of Lecter's lovely fireplace, reopening the tiny ruptures inside of him and darkening the bruises again.

Will felt the hem of his jeans slacken as the buttons and zipper were popped. But as soon as he was distracted, the tension of his position over the countertop brought him back to trying to get purchase on the tips of his toes. Lecter sucked another mark onto him, edging Will over the line between pleasure and pain and toeing up to unbearable agony. Will sighed into it, the exhalation becoming an embarrassingly shrill whine.

Lecter was breathing against the place where his spine sloped down between his ass cheeks. Will was shivering with the effort of keeping himself up on his toes. Nobody had ever ate him out, his breath came shorter and shorter, both from the pressure on his chest and the anticipation.

Nice of him to eat him without killing him, he thought hazily as he flirted with unconsciousness.

"You like changing the color of our skin," Will said aloud, and his tone sounded strange to his ears, as if he were far away and speaking against a high wind. Dr. Lecter paused, Will felt the point of his chin where he rested his head on the flat of Will's coccyx, the cheeks of his face up against the cheeks of Will's ass.

“Matthew’s and mine. I bet he was pale too, so the bruises showed,” Will went on.

It was as if a storm had whipped up in the kitchen. A freezing wind whistled from no apparent source, swirling faster and faster as it spun around the four corners of the room. The pressure on Will’s torso let up and he melted down the counter, and slid to the floor, balling himself up and cowering in the puddle of his jeans, wrists still loosely bound by his t-shirt.

As quickly as it had come, the air seemed sucked out of the room, leaving an unsettling vacuum that pressed on Will’s eardrums and the silence of the old kitchen ringing like a bell.

“Dr. Lecter?” Will called out, timid and quiet. He cleared his throat and tried again, “excuse me? Dr. Lecter?”

Nobody answered him. For the first time since Will had first entered this house all those months ago, he felt truly alone. He hadn’t realized how much the presence, even when he hadn’t know that it was a person, had been a comfort. He felt small and chilly. He shivered, on the floor.

Trembling, he rose to his feet.

“Dr. Lecter?” he called again.

He paced through the house, even venturing to the basement and the drafty attic with its litter of possums, but Dr. Lecter did not appear. He stopped short of touching the suit of samurai armor in the bedroom, but it was a near thing.

Dawn came, frigid and grey. Will settled in the study, curled around himself shivering against the valiant efforts of the dying fire until exhaustion claimed him.

He woke late, his hips aching where they had been pressed into the counter. His eyes were swollen and red and he scrubbed at them angrily. His back didn’t ache very much and that only made him feel worse.

Disconsolately, he tried going through his usual haunts on the internet, paging between sites on his phone without really seeing any of them. He felt his thoughts being dragged as if by a riptide back to the invisible Doctor, dead for 50 years.

Finally he caved, and reached for the journal he had been working through. He slumped in a chair and picked up where he had left off, hating himself.

-x-

September 18, 1946

Matthew has made excellent progress. We have been having dinner after some of our appointments. I haven’t ever felt this way before. I didn’t think that I

The next line had been crossed out in a flurry of black ink. Tilt the page as he might, Will couldn’t make out what Dr. Lecter hadn’t believed himself capable of.

Flipping curiously forward, Will saw more and more of the blacked out scribbly places. He

went back to September.

Matthew has had fewer and fewer nightmares. He says our therapy helps, but still more helpful I think are the nights

The end of that line, too, had been crossed out.

I want to show him my butcher shop, he speaks so kindly of my cooking. We think alike, him and I, I want to trust him with such secrets as I have.

September 29, 1946

Matthew and I do not think so similarly as I had thought. I spoke rashly, I am terrified to lose him. I don't want to be alone forever

The words went on but the marks pressed more and more deeply into the paper, until no ink had marked the page and all that remained were the indents. Will did his best to go on reading with firelight, but he could only work out some of it.

Here and there the page bent as if spotted by water. There are no entries for the whole of October, save for one short paragraph isolated by empty pages on either side, utterly obliterated by black ink. In places, Dr. Lecter had pressed so hard the paper had torn. Will turned past two empty sheets of paper to find the next entry.

November 2, 1946

Matthew has made a full recovery and has been discharged as my patient. I hear he has moved somewhere West, maybe Montana? I'm sure he will not write, eager as he is to move on in good health.

"Oh, no," Will breathed aloud. "You had to kill him didn't you?" There was no answer. Will looked to the fire, staring until the flames burned purple spots into his retinas.

"He didn't love all of you, so you killed him! You killed him!" Will shouted so loudly his words echoed back off the walls. If anyone was camping up on Bloody Bend, Will had probably created enough material for scores of new horror stories.

"Dr. Lecter I know about the other part of you, let me cook with you! I'll prove it to you!" Will shouted, his voice growing hoarse as he carried on. "Come back, please! You're all I have," Will trailed off as the house went on yawning dark and wide and empty as a tomb.

He felt his eyes swelling up again and brushed at the tears running down his cheeks. Will jerked his shirt up and stared at the bite mark on his hip. "Don't you remember this? Doesn't this mean anything to you?"

Will fled the room, blasting through the kitchen and throwing open the pantry doors. He clattered down to the basement and got up on the table, working only from muscle memory without a light to guide him in the darkness. He didn't want to impede Dr. Lecter's movements in any way.

“Do it then,” he said when he lay on the metal table. “Don’t leave me rotting here if you’re done with me, do it!”

Will waited and waited, but nothing happened. He remained whole and intact, and alone.

-x-

Will lay around in the study like a human waste product for days.

Finally, as if moving through a dream, he rose from the couch and moved all the furniture into the entry hall. Then he rolled up the rug, and stripped the fading and scarred stain from the wooden floors. The methodical, physical labor restored him better than any amount of crying and he threw himself into it. He left the study to dry and immediately through himself into the kitchen tiles.

He thought about sharks as he moved, who were supposed to have to keep moving or be unable to breathe. He got halfway done before it became too dark to see.

Will slept deeply for the first time in weeks.

The next day he woke with the sun and finished the tiling. He ended up hauling the huge dining table outside to repair the wooden floor in that room. While he was there, he contemplated the planters on the wall. He had some time yet before spring planting, but they still looked a mess. Will emptied them out, marking a day to get potting soil and seeds in the calendar of his phone.

He was charging the phone off his car, which he left running now and then. He didn’t use the phone over much and it held the charge well. Will wondered if it was worth investing in a small generator. Maybe Dr. Lecter would finally appear to object, he mused, and even if he didn’t Will could charge his phone, maybe even run a little space heater, inside the house.

He left for the hardware store, looking for tiles for the upstairs bathroom, his generator, and as an afterthought, scrap wood to build a ladder for the study. Eventually he would need to consult all the journals on the upper level, even without its curator giving him recommended reading. He was standing in line at the checkout when he felt a tug on his neck. Will still wore the planchette, even after... everything. He shifted the necklace while the world’s slowest cashier paged through a book of barcodes. The next tug was sharp, and unmistakable. Will wrapped a hand around it and his heart thudding vehemently in his chest. Maybe Lecter missed him, maybe he had finally forgiven him.

The cashier, as if sensing his sudden urgency, seemed to move even more slowly. Will thought he had met speedier glaciers. His foot started jiggling impatiently, bouncing the car keys in his pocket. The cashier gave him an unimpressed look and went back to the barcodes.

Finally, finally, Will gathered up all his things, along with the receipt (and the paper had needed replacing and the cashier wouldn’t just let him leave without one because of course), practically running out of the store. Will loaded all the stuff into the trunk. The Ouija board was still at the house, but he was dying for contact, anything. Will grabbed a spare bit of wood from the trunk, a piece he had intended to contribute to some of the rungs in the ladder.

It was roughly square, and Will drew out a ragged alphabet with the sharpie that lived in his glove box.

Will pulled the planchette off his neck and set it on the board. Belatedly, he wondered if it might not be Dr. Lecter. “Dr. Lecter,” Will said firmly, “if you’re here please speak to me. Anyone else is not welcome.” Immediately the planchette skidded away across the board, Will wasn’t even touching it.

DANGER, it spelled out, PEOPLE AT HOUSE DON’T COME.

“People at the house and you don’t want me to come,” Will said crossly, “of course I’m coming back.” He hesitated, “wait is it the cops?”

NO, said the planchette, BUT MANY.

Will tightened his jaw, a fury he didn’t believe himself capable of rising in his chest. How dare they, whoever they were, come into his house, Dr. Lecter’s house, without invitation? The irony of his anger did not escape him, given how he, himself, had originally come to the house, but still the rage burned on.

Will drove back towards the house and parked a half mile back from his usual hiding spot off the road, as always careful to hide the car away from where passing cars would catch the gleam of his reflectors. Before he left the car, Will picked up the only things he thought might make for a decent weapon: a hammer, a screwdriver, and a length of wire. His favorite knife had been left in the house.

It was late afternoon, and Will crept carefully towards the house, staying low. His time spent repairing the windows had made him intimately acquainted with the blind spots. The planchette jiggled on his neck and Will irritably pulled the necklace back off his neck and stuffed it into his pocket.

“Quit it, you,” he whispered, “this concerns both of us.”

The cord he had strung the planchette on stuck out away from its pocket rather than hanging low, but it wasn’t pointing back to the car. Will sighed exasperatedly.

“Fine,” he whispered, “where are we going?”

The planchette tugged hard again like an overeager dog straining against its leash.

Will found himself being led away to the house to the south east, further from the road and his car. He lost sight of the house and still Dr. Lecter led him on. Will was just contemplating knotting up the cord and heading back when they reached a steep shale cliff. The planchette pointed him to a sharply switchbacked path that took him over the face of the cliff and brought him to a little cave in the face.

A few feet in was a metal grille with a gate. “Oh, sneaky,” Will told his pocket, and bent to look at the padlock that secured the gate. It popped open in his hand. Will stepped through and relocked the gate, before abruptly thinking that if the path had caved in he was well and

truly fucked. Maybe Dr. Lecter would open the lock again, but maybe Dr. Lecter was still angry with him for talking about Matthew Brown and had intended him to be trapped here all along.

Will pushed the thought aside, mostly because he wasn't sure what else he could do, and slipped through the tunnel. Water dripped through the rock, discolored stains from algae and differing mineral composition made the cave a patchwork of colors. The late afternoon light could only reach so far though, and soon Will was creeping along in pitch blackness.

His mind spun horrors, reaching out for the next stretch of wall and instead feeling human hair. A sound of movement in the distance, a dark chuckle echoing off the walls. Will reached for the phone in his back pocket every few steps, but each time managed to fight the temptation. Dr. Lecter had given him the gift of surprise and Will had to believe the doctor was still watching over him.

After a seeming eternity, Will wiggled through an odd gap in the stone, pressed himself through a narrow, miraculously silent, door and crawled through a low gap, and found himself in Dr. Lecter's basement. He couldn't explain his certainty that he was indeed in the old kill room, but something about the smell and feel of the place felt like the embrace of an old friend.

Will had half expected to find some of their visitors camped out down here telling ghost stories, but since it was still and silent, Will now suspected they had no idea whose house they were in. He felt weirdly condescending at that, even he had known it was the house of the Chesapeake Ripper when he had broken in.

Making his way by the table in the blackness, moving unerringly through the room despite the absolute darkness, Will trailed his fingers over the painted metal. The planchette didn't react and Will refused to be disappointed. He had stuck the hammer through a belt loop in his jeans and now he pulled it out and spun it idly on the fulcrum of his thumb.

Padding up the stairs Will put his ear to the pantry door. He heard nothing and so he eased the hidden panel open a crack and peered into the kitchen. Nobody was there, but Will was met with the angled light of the setting sun.

Will retreated back into the stairwell and sat down, pulling the panel shut after him. He felt the presence of strangers in the house like a living thing under his skin.

But he knew it was better to wait for dark.

A girl's raucous laughter echoed through the house and Will's grip tightened on the hammer. His other hand drifted to the bite mark on his hip.

The Will who had lain on the grass up on Bloody Bend would never have imagined himself capable of sitting absolutely still for three consecutive hours. But the Will who sat on the stairs leading to Dr. Lecter's basement did just that. He didn't think of anything much, or look at anything in particular. He just held the handle of his hammer in one hand and clasped the other around the bite mark on his hip, and he waited.

The light faded and eventually vanished entirely. As Will sat in the stairwell, he came to understand seven distinct voices. Three girls, four boys. He guessed their age somewhere around 17. Probably applying for the undergrad programs at his own school. He'd heard a few names, but not enough times to definitively match them to voices. He had never felt so calm in his life.

When it was perfectly dark, Will eased himself out of the stairwell and into the pantry proper. The doors were still closed, and since the doors were louvered, Will could faintly make out the particulars of the kitchen beyond. His heart beat steady and slow, his breath moved silently through his nose.

He could hear the group in the study nearby, their laughter and the clink of bottles. Will realized with an abruptness that nearly shook him out of his glacial calm that he himself had not touched alcohol for months. His head spun and he was about to slip into the basement and back out the tunnel, when he heard one of the girls suggest that they go upstairs in a loud, warbling voice.

Will's ear snapped to the sounds of the thundering footsteps, and he froze, instantly back in his predatory stillness. A shout rang out and he heard some of them break off and go running around the house, back into the sitting room, around through the dining room and towards Will in the kitchen.

As they came closer, Will decided it was two of the boys. The first was a fair distance ahead, so when he passed out of the kitchen, Will braced himself for the second boy and as he drew up to the closet, Will lunged out of the doors and smacked the boy with the hammer before he even had the chance to scream. The only sound was the dull thud of him striking the floor.

Moving quickly, Will grabbed the boy's shirt and pulled it over his head before he could bleed all over the neat kitchen floor. Then he dropped back and grabbed the boy's ankle and dragged the body backwards into the closet, carefully closing the louvered doors and kicked him down the stairs, drawing the back of the closet flush with the walls once more.

Will situated the body near one of the drains in the floor and hoped that Dr. Lecter was there with him. "Show me how you got me up to your bedroom that first time" he asked the darkness. As he predicted, he could already hear the group coming down from upstairs to look for the missing boy. Will heard a shuffling behind him and queued up the flashlight function on his phone.

Dr. Lecter had moved the body, apparently dragging the shirt back down from his head before Will had looked. Will moved to the body, and flipped the boy on his back, dragging the bloody shirt back down to better aid whatever end Dr. Lecter had in mind. Then he turned off the phone light, shut his eyes and waited for the Doctor to finish whatever he had in mind.

A wet crunch echoed through the room and Will felt his stomach turn. He held his sleeve over his nose, knowing that if he smelled anything he would lose the battle against throwing up. The crunch stopped and Will opened his eyes. His heart gave a palpable thud as he saw the silhouette of a broad span of shoulders leaning over the body.

“Dr. Lecter?” he asked softly, hardly daring to believe what he was seeing and the figure straightened, turning towards him. As if he were being broadcast over a poor signal, Dr. Lecter’s figure wavered, then dimmed, and finally vanished again.

Will rushed forwards, but there was no sign of him besides a freezing patch of air where the figure had been. Will stood there shivering, hoping for another glimpse.

The body at his feet was missing a good half of its head. Will was really pleased he couldn’t see well enough to discern color or texture. “I’m sorry I brought up Matthew. I’m not like him.” Will said softly, feeling pinned to the spot with his gaze locked on the body.

He felt a touch on his shoulder and, to his horror, felt himself tear up. The hand turned him and he felt a presence at his back. He walked, numbly, content to walk wherever the doctor lead him. His arms were pushed forward at the stove pipe leading up from the cold incinerator, and Will’s fingers met with the rungs of a ladder.

He climbed.

The ladder took him through a path hidden in the chimney. Will was relieved that he was in the chimney that connected the sitting room and Dr. Lecter’s bedroom, rather than the fireplace that supplied the lounge the guest bedroom. Despite himself, Will was also amused because he was totally Santa Claus right now. The flag stone and wrought iron bottom of the fireplaces in the study and Dr. Lecter’s bedroom were hinged. Will never would have guessed if he hadn’t been shown and they swung up soundlessly when Will pushed his free hand against them.

Will crawled out of the fireplace in Dr. Lecter’s bedroom and slunk on his belly across the floor, slipping soundlessly under the bed. He waited there, breathing in the dust and the surprisingly clean smell of Dr. Lecter’s bed linens. From where he lay, he could see the front door, the bookshelf that had broken Bedelia’s leg, and the closet where Dr. Lecter’s suits hung in company with his black medical bag with its many sharp knives.

He slowed his breathing again and waited. Visitors to the house were always drawn here, either for the regal bed, the forbidding samurai armor, or by the unseen guidance of the doctor himself.

-x-

Justin skidded to a halt in the room with the desk, breathing hard, flush with his victor over Tyler. Tyler never shut up about his place as captain of the track team. Justin had gone over the volleyball team when he had been elected captain last year, not that he would ever say as much to Tyler. Instead, he cited the attractive female manager of the team. Better than confronting the black bitterness that consumed him when he saw the white captain’s C on Tyler’s varsity jacket.

Justin lept onto the desk, bracing his hands on his hips, grinning at the door. When Tyler didn’t come running in, he hopped back down, enjoying the loud thud his sneakers made on the hardwood.

“Tyler?” He called out, “What the fuck man how do you get lost in a square?” he drifted back through the kitchen, and the dark dining room beyond.

The guy who had owned this house must have died mid repairs because there were sanders collected on the far end of the dining table. Justin expected he would end up learning how to use those someday. His grades in math would never get him into business school, like his mother wanted, his volleyball game would never get him into Southern California like he wanted. The irony was his track probably would’ve if he hadn’t quit.

He found Hilary and Belle ignoring each other at the foot of the main stairwell while Steve and Constance ignored each other outside on the porch. Matty was trying to balance on the wide hand railing that followed the staircase up and Justin shoved his leg hard enough that he was forced to drop down.

“Where the fuck is Tyler?” he asked, sidling up to Hilary and dropping a kiss on her neck. She shoved him away staring at him indignantly. “What do you mean where’s Tyler?” Justin shoved down the flash of anger and hurt. She was supposed to be his girlfriend not Tyler’s. Their 6 month anniversary was coming up.

“Yeah where’d he go?” Justin asked trying to play it off by shoving his hands in his pockets and slouching.

“He was with you, wasn’t he?” Belle asked and just the sound of her voice made Hilary stiffen. Justin couldn’t wait for that stupid cat fight to be over.

“Yeah, I lost him,” Justin repeated casting his eyes vaguely skyward, avoiding the hostility coming from the girls.

“He probably went upstairs already” said Matty, around the snap hiss of a lighter and a drag from a cigarette. Hilary stuck her hand out to him and he lit another cigarette from the end of the first and passed it to her.

“This place is so fucking creepy.” Hilary muttered around the cigarette and stalked away up the stairs. Belle moved as if to follow her, but thought better of it and sidled outside to sit with Steve. Justin trotted after her, ready to play broad-shouldered hero.

Hilary knocked open the door to the bedroom angrily and it ricocheted off something on the other side. Justin caught it on the rebound and followed her. Hilary’s heels clacked on the hardwood floor as she walked away and paused, giving the room a cursory look around, huffing a disdainful breath of air at the sight of the huge bed.

“Babe, what-” Justin tried.

“He didn’t just vanish, Justin,” Hilary snapped.

“Well then he’s keeping the good alcohol to himself or he’s passed out drunk or he’s gone home, who cares!” Justin said exasperated. He hated it when she got all emotional like this.

But angry sex could be awesome and the bed was generously proportioned. Dead guy bed, he thought, and shuddered delightedly.

“Well, Justin,” Hilary hissed acidly, “if Tyler is passed out drunk then he could die become of like, choking.”

“That doesn’t happen, Hilary,” Justin scoffed.

“It so does!” Hilary snapped.

“You’ll still get your chance to sleep with him,” Justin said bitterly, “so quit being a bitch about it.”

“Not this again,” Hilary groused, like it wasn’t true. She ground out her old cigarette on the carved footboard and flicked the butt away. Immediately she was digging out another one from her jacket. Justin wondered why she thought Belle could do the Leapin’ Lora’s and she couldn’t. Athletes aren’t smokers, coach always said. Not that it stopped everyone on the team. Even if Justin was never getting into Southern California he couldn’t shake the deep seated repulsion towards smoking.

Hilary stalked over to the bed and sat down. She stared at him, exasperated. Justin had intended to sidle up to her and give her his best smooth guy kiss but something about the combination of Tyler, the cigarette, and her fight with Belle had exhausted his benevolence.

“It’s true, isn’t it?” Justin snapped. The least she could do was be honest with her boyfriend. Hilary tapped out her cigarette on the footboard and took another deep drag.

“Am I dating you or am I dating Tyler,” Hilary asked woodenly.

“I don’t even know any more,” Justin muttered scrubbing a hand through his short hair, the gel making the spikes go askew. He belatedly sorted them out by feel. Hilary had flopped backwards onto the bed and Justin was debating making up again when his pocket buzzed.

Matt 7:48pm: sharpshooting contest in 5 u in

Justin hastily typed back **yah** and stuffed the phone back in his pocket. He started towards the door before one glance back at Hilary smoking on the bed.

“Matty’s going to show us his gun.” Justin said lowly and left jerking the door loudly shut behind him.

-x-

“Fuck you, Justin,” Hilary breathed taking another drag off her cigarette and staring despondently at the rising moon out the window. She was getting mighty sick of Justin’s possessiveness. It wasn’t like he was coming to So Cal with her, she had held on to her cheerleading scholarship with an iron fist but his stupid ego had made him let the track scholarship slip through his fingers.

She finished off the cigarette, perching the butt on the headboard and watching the smoke curl for a few moments. The bed creaked, and she felt again the creepiness of the old house bear down on her.

She sat up, checking her hair in the mirror.

Out of the corner of her eye, something moved. She turned to look, and saw a figure dragging itself out from under the bed. She tried to draw breath to scream, but her lungs felt frozen, her limbs wooden. The figure moved faster than she thought possible, sliding fluidly from prone to a crouch.

She scrambled off the bed and ran to the door, she felt that scream coming now, all the air that she could fit in her lungs ready to explode out, when it caught around a cough. She gagged, scrambling for the door handle and the figure was on her.

He moved too fast, she thought panicked, his arms and legs were too long and too skinny, it probably wasn't human. She put her hands out but the man dodged around her and she was kicked to the floor. She felt the bite of something sharp at her neck and grabbed for it, trying to pull it away from her throat, but warm blood was slipping over her fingers and she couldn't muster the air to scream, not even to breathe.

Her last thought was that she knew what had happened to Tyler, and that stupid bitch Justin was going to be sorry.

-x-

A crack of gunfire echoed through the house and Justin followed it outside. Matty had lined up a row of beer bottles on the porch railing and had, apparently, just obliterated one with a well placed shot.

"Tired her out huh?" Matty asked him with a sly grin. Justin laughed knowingly but scrubbed his hand over his hair, and had to straighten it out again. "Nah she's uh, you know, sulking. Women right."

Constance laughed and Belle looked pissed. "It's just facts, Belle, ladies are you know, more emotional," said Justin.

"That's bullshit, Justin," Belle told him, looking cold in her cute jacket and artfully ripped jeans.

"Well I can think of a way to settle this," said Matty grandly, "shoot for it! Here Belle," he said handing the revolver to her, "prove female superiority once and for all."

Belle took aim and fired, missing the bottle but putting a jagged hole in one of the supporting posts in the porch railing.

Justin snatched it out of her hands and took aim, shooting the neck off one of the bottles. Matty whooped behind him.

"One point for Mars," he crowed.

“You guys are such idiots,” huffed Belle and stomped back towards the house. “I’m going to check on Hilary.”

“Is that a good idea,” Steve and Constance asked in chorus and then glared at each other.

“I’ll go check on her,” said Constance, brushing by Belle, “if she’s mad you won’t help.”

Belle pouted, sticking out her lip, but acceded to the eminent wisdom of the idea.

They passed the gun around, waiting for Constance and Hilary to come back. Steve surprised them all by being the best shot, even better than Matty. This, of course, really annoyed Mr. Major General’s son Matty, who snatched the gun back to reload it. “Damn, Steve, if you cheated like you shot you’d still have that scholarship to Hamilton after all.”

Steve whirled around and punched him, but he was so skinny it didn’t do more than make Matty stagger. Justin watched warily. “Fuck you!” Steve said in high voice.

“Go cry about it,” Matty snarled, sticking the revolver back into the pocket of his baggy army jacket.

“Would you guys,” said Belle from where she sat in the grass contemplating the blue glow of her phone, “shut the fuck up. Neither Hilary, Constance, or Tyler is texting me back. Where the fuck are they?”

“Maybe they just don’t want to talk to you,” snipped Matty, apparently on a full blow ego mania trip.

“Yeah, maybe,” growled Belle, glaring at him, “or maybe they’re really hurt.”

“They’re not hurt, oh my god,” Justin exclaimed stretching his arms over his head, “they’re probably just smoking and bitching and avoiding us.” Still, he shifted his weight back to one foot and pulled out his phone.

8:21: hils where r u? matty is being a cunt.

And then, when she didn’t immediately text back, sent a text off to Constance too.

8:21: did u find her?

He was gratified when after a few seconds, his phone buzzed.

Constance 8:22: Yes. She’s pretty upset, though, so give her some space.

Which was awfully articulate for Constance, but she had been turning it around in English lately. Probably why cheating Steve was mad at her.

8:22 well tell her to stop being such a bitch and come out here.

Constance 8:22: sure thing, Casanova.

“Who’s Casanova?” Justin asked, blinking as his night vision crept back after the glare from the phone.

Belle gave him her ‘you’re an idiot’ look, so he sneered back at her. She got up off the grass, dusting off her ass. Matty leered appreciatively. “Let’s go inside,” she said, pointedly ignoring him, it’s getting fucking freezing. And I can’t even put up with more of this without a drink.”

There she was, thought Justin, party girl Belle. She could talk the nerd game with the best of them but at the end of the day she was just like the rest of them. Part of him hoped somebody would smell the water bottle on the corner of Belle’s primly neat desk someday.

Matty dragged him back to his beat up car to grab their cases of beer while Belle and Steven trudged inside. Belle and Steve sat next to the fireplace, bitching, per their usual. “I had it going!” Steve was saying.

“Yeah, sure,” Belle muttered and did something to the pile of wood in the fireplace.

“Chimney’s probably fucked up anyway,” Steve said and flopped back into one of the square chairs, kicking his legs over one arm.

Matty dumped the case of beer he was carrying on the floor in front of the fire. “Here, this’ll warm you up.”

“Doesn’t alcohol actually-” Steve started.

“Less nerding more drinking!” Matty insisted, dragging out a can of beer and throwing it overhand at Steve who jackknifed his whole body in reflex when he caught it.

They were about two cans deep and Matty was telling some inevitably bullshit story about One Time in Wilderness Camp, when Steve drew out his phone and shot off a text.

“Is that Hilary?” Justin asked, feeling heavy and much less irritable now that his toes were buzzing pleasantly.

“No, Constance. She says Hilary’s still really pissed,” Steve said and Justin really hated something in his tone.

“So, you and Constance, huh?” he asked slyly over the lip of the beer can.

“What part of ‘gay’ don’t you understand,” Steve snapped, getting his stupid pinched look that he always got when he was pissed off.

“C’mon,” Matty objected, “nobody’s gay around that” and he drew an exaggerated hourglass in the air with his hands.

“Yes, I am, I’m gay all the time, that’s how gay works,” Steve hissed, taking a massive swallow of beer.

“It’s not a very healthy lifestyle,” said Belle in what she probably thought was a caring voice. Like everything she said, it just came off as bitchy.

“Oh, it’s pretty fucking healthy compared to sleeping with Constance’s mom,” Steve sprang to his feet, breathing hard.

“Jealous?” Matty asked slyly.

“Dude,” Justin laughed, taking another drink of beer, “you are so full of shit,”

“Dude,” said Matty right back, “she’s got tits like you would not believe,” and he made a cupping motion to demonstrate as much.

“Can nobody else see how completely fucked this is?” Steve turned on Belle, “you’re honestly more okay with adultery than two same sex people in love?”

“It’s not really love,” said Belle evenly, “and I’m really sorry you think you need to seek attention that way, like, we’re your fr-” but Steve cut her off before she could finished.

“If you can’t accept who I am you’re not my fucking friend,” he flipped his shaggy hair out of his eyes. “I’m gonna go check on Constance and then I’m going home. Fuck you, for the record,” he pointed at each of them in turn and then strode out of the room.

“You think he’s on his period?” Matty asked and Belle threw her half full can of beer at him.

-x-

Constance 10:01: We’re upstairs

10:01: omw

Steve trudged up the stairs, hugging his elbows through his sweater. If it had been up to him, none of his idiot ‘friends’ would ever have known about the way his brain was oriented. If it was up to him, Constance would be expelled from school for cheating off his test.

Instead he had been blamed, and he didn’t know any way his teacher could’ve found out that he liked guys, but even so he couldn’t shake the feeling that was why he had taken the proverbial bullet instead of Constance. He deserved to go to Hamilton and Constance sure as fuck didn’t deserve any praise for “turning her grades around”.

Too bad that bitch didn’t pay closer attention to her water bottle. Steve knew she would get roaring drunk tonight, like she always did, and then after it was way too late to help she would take long pulls of water to stave off the headache. He was counting on her not smelling the draino he’d replaced the water with until it was too late.

Gutless, Steve thought, adjective, informal: lacking courage or determination. He giggled. This was going to be so much better than killing that kid last summer. Nobody would catch him, just like nobody had realized the kid hadn’t hit her head on a rock

in the watering hole. She was so small, Steve thought, barely eight years old. It put a thrill through him.

Steve breezed into the only open room and looked around impatiently. “Guys, where are you. I’m not in the mood for bullshit, Belle’s on one of her homophobia kicks again and” he stopped. He was standing right by the door and would swear he had heard a breath from behind it.

Steve took a slow step backwards edging inch by inch back towards the hallway. The door swung towards him, hitting him hard in the head, and then wide open again. He shouted, putting his hands over his forehead and trying to keep his balance as his head swam.

A boy stepped around the door, he was lanky and looked unwell, sunken eyes behind large glasses seeming to yawn wide in the darkness of the room. The boy grabbed his collar and dragged him into the room slamming the door again.

The boy threw him by the collar but Steve managed to get his footing and stayed upright, staggering between the foot of the bed and the mirror over the fireplace.

Looking back at the boy he saw that he was holding a hammer, spinning it restlessly. He also saw dark fluid splattered over the boy’s face and down the front of his plaid shirt.

Steve drew breath to shout, but someone else must’ve been in the room too because hands wrapped around his throat, big hands he realized the guy must be huge, and squeezed. The boy’s eyes were wide staring at him, did he not know there had been another person there either.

Steve fumbled in his pocket as his vision went black, looking for something, anything, and coming up with his bic lighter. He flipped it and held it up to the man’s arms. They jerked away immediately and Steve fell to his hands and knees, coughing hard. He tried to crawl backwards, away from the boy and his hammer.

He was vaguely thinking that he might try to dive out the window when the boy caught up to him, dragging him up to his knees by his hair. Face to face, Steve realized the boy wasn’t all that young after all, maybe even older than him.

Steve was expecting to be struck with the hammer but the man’s expression had gone wild, even insane, and he bared his teeth in an inhuman snarl. Quick as snake, the man lunged and fastened those wicked teeth around Steve’s throat. There was a sharp tearing, and the spray of Steve’s blood blackened the man’s face and then he was gone.

-x-

The beer wasn’t sitting well with Justin.

Belle had retreated to her phone, texting furiously and ignoring him and Matty. Matty had fallen asleep and was snoring thunderously with his head tipped backwards on the chair.

10:22: that was fucked up

Justin waited but Steve didn’t text him back.

10:24: i dnt care, u no? that ur gay.

10: 24: just dnt hit on me ;P

He put the phone on his thigh and flopped his head back onto the chair, losing himself to the vague swing and tilt of nausea. The phone buzzed.

Steve 10:31: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. English Major, Justin thought, amused.

10:31: did Hils calm down

Steve 10:32: Yes.

10:32 where are u?

Steve 10:32: Upstairs. Come hang out with us.

10:33: if I can stand lol

Justin stood up successfully, and made his way to the stairs with liberal assistance from the walls and bookshelves. He decided to go up the staircase on all fours, both because it was inexplicably funny and because he was less likely to fall over.

He found Steve staring out the window in the bedroom. The moon was coming up and it silhouetted Steve in his baggy hoody.

“Where’s Hilary?” Justin asked walking over to him.

“Smoking on the roof.” Steve answered. He sounded a little hoarse, Justin hoped he hadn’t been crying. It was always so weird when guys cried.

“There’s a roof out there?” Justin asked, jumping up on the bed and trying a few experimental jumps on the mattress. The alcohol caught up to him and he flopped spread eagle on it, giggling. The thought of Hilary caught up to him and he sat bolt upright, groaned, and fell back over.

“Dude is she still mad at me?”

“Probably.” Said Steve, still not looking at him.

“I thought you said she calmed down!” said Justin indignantly.

“Yes she’s much quieter now,” Steve agreed.

“But I still need to suck up huh.” Justin asked despondently.

“People remember when you treat them poorly.” His tone was weird: too flat, almost a drone. Probably still brooding about Hilary and Matty. Better for him to get used to this kind of thing now, Justin thought idly, this was how the real world was.

“All I said,” he explained, “was that she liked Tyler. Which is true okay, every girl in the world likes Tyler.”

Steve didn’t reply.

“You probably like Tyler too, huh,” Justin asked, feeling benevolent for being so inclusive. Probably nobody talked to Steve about this shit.

“He’s not really my type,” Steve said, voice still flat and hoarse.

“What you don’t like black guys?” Justin asked. He understood, Hilary didn’t look too Latina or he probably wouldn’t have liked her either.

“No,” Steve said, “I just like them ...older.”

“Oh, like Matty huh. But I dunno him sleeping with Constance’s mom is like, 90% bullshit. And if he did, and he’s still hitting on Constance? Gross.”

Steve chuckled lowly, “it’s pretty gross, yeah.”

“But I’m betting he didn’t and he’s just trying to sound like he’s you know,” Justin made a vague motion with his hands. “Anyway, what am I gonna say to Hilary.”

“Tell her you trust her,” said Steve.

“What?”

“You just accused her of cheating on you. That you don’t trust her to be faithful. Tell her you trust her.” Steve still hadn’t turned around and Justin got the funny feeling Steve was blaming him for Hilary’s bitch fit.

“Well maybe she should trust me, huh?” he blurted out, getting up off the bed.

“You asked me what you should tell her.” Steve replied placidly.

“This wasn’t my fault,” Justin protested, walking up to Steve. He put his hand on Steve’s shoulder and turned him to face him. Then suddenly realized, that wasn’t Steve.

Not-Steve smiled, a horrible smile, white teeth framed by something dark staining his gums. A dark stain ran down from the neck of his hoodie. He pulled his hands from the big middle pocket of the hoodie and Justin saw the hammer a second before Not-Steve raised it and brought it down.

Will dragged Justin back over to the fireplace. He wasn't sure how Dr. Lecter had rigged the chimney such that the body fell straight to the basement without hitting the downstairs fireplace, but it was very clever. Maybe one of the unread journals would mention it, possibly those in Lithuanian.

And then there were two, he thought. He still hadn't thought of a good way to deal with Matty's gun, and the other girl Belle wasn't answering texts from Steve's or Constance's phones. Justin had bought his impression of Steve fairly well, so Will thought he might try it again.

He had to count on Belle being willing to start drama with him because Will didn't think he could make himself apologize for being gay even as an act. Will himself wasn't even gay, more demisexual he was pretty sure, but it sat wrong in his head.

He stepped gingerly down the stairs. The blood on the hoodie was drying and the smell of iron wafted up to his nose. Will went still and tried to edge towards the study, when Matty came around the corner at a quick clip. They smacked into each other and Will staggered back towards the door to the sitting room.

Matty drew his gun immediately. "Who the fuck are you?" he asked, probably trying to seem macho. Unfortunately for Will, he had picked up the technique somewhere and held the gun correctly with both hands. Will stared at him silently. Belle was still in the study and he had to deal with both of them.

As a young boy, Will had thrown knives at the old pine tree in the backyard. But that was a long time ago, and a hammer wasn't the same thing as a knife. It was a terrible idea but it was the only one he had. If he could take out Matty with the thrown hammer, he could catch Belle before she could run too far. He hoped.

Matty was still yelling "who the fuck are you"s and "where the fuck is"s. Will shifted the hammer in hand, trying to find something resembling a balance.

Then Belle bolted, knocking into Matty's shoulder and diving for the front door, wrenching it open and about to dive through. Will didn't hesitate, he couldn't afford to leave a witness, he threw the hammer. At the same time, the gun fired.

In the space of a heartbeat, Will heard Belle fall to the hardwood floor and turned towards Matty, hoping he survived the bullet long enough to kill the other man.

But instead of the impact of a bullet, Will faced the image of Dr. Lecter, outlined in a strange dark light like the afterimage left on the eye after looking at a bright light. The bullet must have hit ...something, because Dr. Lecter doubled over and the image vanished.

Will wished he could attribute what happened next to possession, but his inner most self acknowledged that it was all him. He became a tool for no purpose other than punishing the person that had hurt Dr. Lecter. And he knew Dr. Lecter was dead, he knew it, but it made no difference.

Will launched his full body weight at Matty and took him down to the floor. The gun spun away down the hall. Matty was begging him in a high voice, blubbering and crying. Will took

his skull in his hands, thumbs resting in the soft vulnerable temples, and slammed it against the floor.

Matty stopped moving and crying after the first crack of skull on wood, but Will kept going. That was the part he wished he could blame on someone else. His head was full of the name Matthew and the sight of Dr. Lecter's body folding over and disappearing.

The sound changed from smacking to something wetter. Still Will kept going, lost in the rise and fall of the body beneath him. He kept going until he felt hands on his wrists and a familiar cold breath behind his ear.

"Dr. Lecter?" he asked voice tremulous.

Dr. Lecter's familiar arms wrapped around him and Will devolved into loud, ugly tears. Will was pulled to his feet and he squeezed his eyes shut, hoping for the best illusion of bodily contact available. Obliging, Dr. Lecter folded him into his chest and rubbed Will's back until the tears dried up and the hiccups faded back into breath.

Will felt Dr. Lecter turn him around and push him to kneel beside the mutilated corpse on the floor. A knife was folded into his hands and Will was guided to cut into the stomach and then more cuts that must have made sense to Dr. Lecter. From Will's perspective it was all a mess of blood, hot and sticky.

"Wouldn't you rather do this yourself?" Will asked and Dr. Lecter's fingers adjusted the angle of his blade ever so slightly, but his only response was a freezing kiss to the side of his neck.

Finally they came away with a large, lustrously red organ that Will might hazard was the liver. He hadn't touched biology since high school.

Lecter pulled him up and guided him with his liver into the study. Evidently, Dr. Lecter had used Will's tantrum to arrange an impromptu kitchen on the flagstone hearth before the fireplace. Will wondered where the knife had come from, he remembered it disappearing from the cutting board in the kitchen after the first night when Fred and Jimmy had died.

The knife was resting gently on the large cutting board and there was a deep bottomed pot beside that with one of Will's water bottles and some neat aluminum pots whose contents Will could only guess at.

Lecter had him lay the liver on the cutting board and slice it, his hands guided by Lecter's own above them. Will kept his eyes half lidded, trying to give Dr. Lecter as much help as he could. The actual mechanics of when he could see and feel Dr. Lecter were fuzzy to him, but he knew it was easier on the ghost the less Will looked directly at him.

The sliced liver went into the pot and Will's bottle of water went over it, followed then by sprinkles of some kind of herbs from the little aluminum pots. Lecter had him place the lid on the pot and then turned Will towards the fire place until Will got the picture and built up the fire again.

Direct contact with fire must not agree with him, Will thought, he had seen Dr. Lecter carry candles around, but he had also seen Steve burn him with lighter. Even that little flame had made Dr. Lecter vanish as if he'd never been there.

While the fire got hotter and the liver marinated, Will was directed to light candles in the dining room, placing most of them at one end of the long table. Dr. Lecter had produced two chairs from somewhere. Will always suspected they had been hidden under the basement, but he hadn't gone to dig them out until the floors were done.

With the candles lit, Will could see the ornate dark wood that made up the walls and ceiling of the room. With the warm wood of the flooring, it gave the dining room an arterial feeling.

Dr. Lecter shepherded him back to the kitchen where he found two inexplicably clean place settings, plates with chargers and gleaming forks and knives. When Will had arranged them satisfactorily, he was pushed back to the study where the fire was now roaring merrily. Dr. Lecter hung back while Will gingerly pushed the pot with liberal assistance of an iron poker into the flames.

Then he was led down to the basement proper, accessed by a door under the stairs rather than through the pantry. Will had never ventured down here but he wasn't at all surprised to find a wine cellar, pleasantly cool and still well stocked.

Lecter selected something Will couldn't even guess at and pushed Will's hands towards it. Will remembered his moment on the pantry stairs and how long he had gone without a drink. He hesitated. Lecter paused behind him too and Will was turned around and guided back towards the stairs without the bottle.

"Sorry," Will said when they were back in the hall. Dr. Lecter smoothed a hand through his curls. When Will moved back to the dining room, he found one glass with wine at the head of the table and the other matching glass filled with water. He felt powerfully relieved. He hadn't even known he'd wanted to quit, wouldn't even have said it was a problem. But now, facing the table settings, he thought he would be losing something to take that sip of wine.

While Dr. Lecter waited on the liver, Will retrieved his car bringing it close to the house. He would need to do something with the two cars the dead kids had brought with them. He could dump them at a chop shop the next evening and hope the crews were feeling more industrious than the police. Will didn't expect the kids to be reported missing until Monday at the earliest.

Will retrieved his cooler from the trunk and brought it into the study where the light was brightest, emptying the water bottles onto the flagstone where they wouldn't damage the hardwood.

Thankfully for their dinner, Dr. Lecter didn't appear to need light to see his livestock. The bodies in the basement had probably been sitting for too long at room temperature but Will suspected Dr. Lecter would want to get what he could from the two fresh bodies.

Indeed, Will felt the familiar feeling of Dr. Lecter taking up residence in his body, Will let himself stop paying attention as Dr. Lecter used his hands and the scalpel with alarming speed to extract muscle and organs from Belle and Matty, stopping only when the large cooler was full of meat and ice. Will took what was left down to the basement beneath the pantry when Dr. Lecter released him.

Will wasn't sure just yet what to do with the bodies. He was partial to the idea of dragging them out to a body of deep water and weighting them down wrapped in tarp and chicken wire. But the disposal of a murder victim didn't bear rushing.

Dr. Lecter appeared, and Will startled when he realized he could see the outline of the other man even looking directly at him in firelight. He bit his lip feeling unaccountably shy. The outline, like a contour drawing that had walked off the page, gestured towards the fireplace.

Will took the cue and used Steve's hoodie and the iron poker to extract the pot with the liver slices. When Will had the pot on the flag stone, the outline of Dr. Lecter crouched and picked it up, apparently no worse off for touching the blazing hot iron.

Will followed him into the dining room and sat in his place. He was suddenly aware of the dark blood that clotted in his clothing and matted his hair. It must not have troubled Dr. Lecter because he served the liver to both of them. Will could never have guessed how gracefully the man moved, both in life and death, until he saw it for himself. Even with just the empty outline to go on, the ease and poise of his movements was obvious.

Lecter's outline sat, and Will held his glass up for a toast, smiling weakly. "It's good to see you," he said shyly. The outline vanished where it touched the glass of wine, but the wine glass lifted off the table and clinked delicately with Will's all the same.

To Will's immense surprise, the liver was actually good. A taste he wasn't used to, certainly, but hardly an objectionable one with the brightness of the herbs balancing the cloyingly heavy taste of the meat.

Will looked up again after a few bites, wanting to see if Lecter's liver was also vanishing from its plate, instead he was faced with the very opaque visage of Dr. Lecter himself. Will turned his head and stared hard, but Lecter only looked back at him, as solid as if he were himself flesh and blood. Tall, broad shouldered, with razor sharp cheek and brow bones, clad in an elaborate blue suit.

"Hello, Will," he said, quietly.

"Hello, Dr. Lecter," Will said, smiling and slipping another bite of liver into his mouth. Dr. Lecter's smile turned slightly feral and he watched Will's mouth fixedly. After a moment his gaze snapped up to match Will's and he said "Hannibal, please, Will."

"Alright, Hannibal then," Will agreed.

"I'm very lucky you found me." Hannibal told him. The more he spoke, the more Will realized he wasn't so much making sound as he was making Will hear sound. Will very much doubted a tape recorder would pick up Hannibal's half of the conversation.

“I think that’s my line,” Will replied, smiling shyly.

“I would appreciate you letting me have it all the same,” Will laughed at that. “Alright,” he agreed. Abruptly he remembered the bullet and his eyes narrowed on the place he guessed the bullet would hit. There was no wound, but neither was there anything else. It was a see-through place like a tiny window that went entirely through Hannibal’s body.

“It doesn’t hurt,” Hannibal offered quietly. Will had seen old pictures of him on microfiche, but it didn’t fully prepare him for the real thing.

“Thanks,” Will said quietly.

“You have cared for my home, defended it from intruders, and shared this meal with me,” Hannibal said insistently, “I was happy to do it.”

“They shouldn’t have come here,” Will murmured and tucked another cut of liver into his mouth, chewing thoughtfully.

“Do you really not mind me writing a thesis about you?” Will blurted out.

“No, Will, I do not mind. I expect it will help you a great deal.” Hannibal said amiably, then added, “but thank you for asking. Then and now.” Will’s mind flashed back to that first evening, laying in the big bed with his legs folded up to his chest. He flushed and ducked his face.

Hannibal followed his gaze, ducking to making eye contact. “You’re very beautiful, Will.”

“You’re one to talk,” Will grumbled. He hadn’t dared to look in a mirror properly and even before being doused in blood knew he was too thin and too angry looking to be really beautiful. And Hannibal had all ...all that.

“But your friend is right, you should eat more, and you were right, I do worry.” Hannibal said matter of factly, neatly slicing off another piece of liver and slipping it between his (very sharp) teeth. Will didn’t know what to say to that. He felt small and abruptly out of place.

“We will work on it.” Hannibal told him at once gentle and firm. Just like that, Will felt at home again.

“I really like being here,” Will whispered.

“I really like you being here,” Hannibal said in the same reassuring tone.

“I’m sorry about,” Will set his fork on the plate and twisted his fingers together anxiously, “what I said. I didn’t know what I was saying.”

“Apology accepted,” Hannibal allowed easily.

“Oh, uh, really?”

“Yes, of course. I rather overreacted myself.”

“Maybe we could,” Will picked up the fork and toyed with it, his cheeks burning, “...again, to make up for it.”

“We could,” Hannibal agreed, tone warm and lush, “but if you agree to it, I’ve something rather different in mind for this particular evening.”

“Uh, what?” Will asked, ever tactful.

“No dessert before you’ve finished your dinner, William,” Hannibal chided, apparently amused.

Will straightened himself and set back to the liver. Hannibal chuckled at his zeal.

“It’s cold,” he said as Will ate, “but there is a stream down the hill to the north. You could get clean.”

“I have water in my car,” Will said, “it’s closer.”

Hannibal nodded, his gaze not leaving Will’s.

No sooner had he finished the liver than Hannibal whisked his plate away looking pointedly out the north windows.

Will took a very quick, very cold bath with the water from the water drum in his trunk, not all that different from his morning swims in the freezing ocean water of the boat yard, and sprinted back to the house. He had flung his trousers over his shoulder, not willing to deal with wet jeans and suspecting his clothing would be coming off again soon anyway.

Hannibal was there to propel him back towards the fire in the living room. Even in the brightest light available, he was completely solid but for the bullet hole in his chest. Will shivered in the wide chair and stared at him, drinking in his appearance with a desperate thirst.

Hannibal had abandoned his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeves, as if he really had just washed the dishes. The sight of his steeply sloping forearm muscles dried Will’s mouth and he swallowed hard. Hannibal crouched down in front of his chair, leaning hard on the arms and kissed him.

Will wanted to look at Hannibal as long as he could, but his eyes fluttered closed at the heat behind the kiss. He settled for sliding his fingers up the warm forearms and over the crisp shirt, clasping his fingers behind Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal crouched lower and slipped his arms under Will’s knees, picking Will up so they were pressed together chest to chest, with Will’s arms around his neck and his legs around his waist. “This should be at least a little harder for me,” Hannibal admonished him against his lips. Will nodded, unhearing, trying to taste more skin, amazed that he could taste it at all.

Hannibal carried him out of the study plunging Will into the pitch blackness of the abandoned house. If he thought about it, he couldn't feel anything supporting him, he was just floating along with his legs and arms around nothing. So Will decided not to think about it.

Hannibal set Will on the foot of his bed and Will lay back, he felt an odd sense of déjà vu, remembering how he had been laid on his back in this bed when they had first done this and he couldn't see Hannibal.

As if hearing his thoughts, there was a dull pop, like Will had popped his ear drums, and candles flared to life around the room. The flames were a sickly blue, giving Hannibal a weird pale cast to his skin. Rather than the room getting hotter from the dozen candles around them, Will felt even colder, and he shifted his hips nervously down the bed towards Hannibal.

"It's nice to see you this time," Will offered, sounding stupid to his own ears. Hannibal flashed him a quick smile and then he blurred. Before Will could panic, Hannibal snapped back into focus now without his immaculate suit. Will strongly suspected that Hannibal took a beat to pose for him before striding back over to Will.

Over Hannibal's shoulder, Will saw that Hannibal's reflection was cloudy and wispy. Before he could remark on this, Hannibal was bearing him down, relentless and implacable.

Hannibal's hands were on his wrists, pushing them over his head and Will pushed against them experimentally. He couldn't move Hannibal even an inch, but it made Hannibal grin showing his canines. The blue candlelight reflected wetly off those sharp teeth. Will shivered.

Hannibal nosed Will's chin up and kissed and sucked his way from behind Will's ears down his neck. Will still didn't know what Hannibal had meant by "trying something different" but he was rapidly losing the ability to care.

Will wondered just how much Hannibal liked him putting up a fight, so when Hannibal licked his nipple and nipped the edge with his teeth, Will used the arch of his back to disguise him getting his hip out from under the other man. Then when Hannibal shifted his weight to mouth at the line of Will's lowest ribs, Will flipped them.

Hannibal blinked at him owlishly. The blue light of the candles didn't illuminate any shine in Hannibal's eyes like they did his teeth. Will bent over him and kissed him and Hannibal shifted his hips up so Will's hips were flush with Hannibal's ass, and Will's cock throbbed appreciatively.

Hannibal dug his heels into Will's back, making his cock slip between Hannibal's ass cheeks, and Will made an embarrassing noise and fell to his knees and elbows, face pressed into Hannibal's neck. Hannibal turned his head and nipped at the point of Will's cheekbone. "Yes?" he asked, voice low and accent grinding the word into a growl.

Will pushed himself up and looked at Hannibal more directly, studying his face in the pale light from the candles. "Really?" he asked, waiting for Hannibal to laugh or something. "I'm deadly serious, good Will." Hannibal deadpanned. Will rolled his eyes and glanced around the room agitated. "Oh, then, do you have, um?" he asked, eloquently.

“I’m not sure it’s necessary,” said Hannibal, his pale brows pinching together. His eyes fluttered closed like he was thinking hard, and then he focused in on Will again.

“Try it,” he offered, smiling wolfishly.

“Easy, killer,” Will muttered, Hannibal was dead and he shouldn’t be so anxious about not hurting him, but still the emotion pushed against his throat.

Sitting up and back on his heels he slipped a hand from Hannibal’s knee and down over the velvet soft skin of his inner thigh. Probing at his ass, Will felt it open and slick, like he had been preparing Hannibal all this time. Will slipped two fingers into Hannibal and his gaze flashed to Hannibal’s face. Hannibal wore an expression of awe. It sat poorly on him, Will thought, meshing awkwardly with the regal features and sharp bone structure, and it made Will love it even more.

It felt unjust to Will. Somebody who knew what they were doing should be here instead of him. Hannibal was too gorgeous, too fearsome to have to tolerate his efforts.

Hannibal bucked impatiently, fingers scrabbling at Will’s sweat-slick back. “Fine, fine,” Will muttered, sulking tone belied by his smile, and set his mouth against Hannibal’s high cheekbone. He held still there, cock within inches of sliding into Hannibal, teeth inches from closing around his cheekbone. Hannibal let out noise suspiciously close to a whine and Will relented.

Will expected fucking a dead man to at least feel a little different, Hannibal tended to breath and kiss closer to arctic than to body temperature, but for whatever reason it didn’t. Which wasn’t to say that fumbling around with his dad’s friend’s cousin’s contract worker made him an expert, but Will still felt like the squeeze and heat of Hannibal’s body was human enough.

“You feel good,” Will said. In his head it was supposed to come out suave and leek, instead it sounded like he was choking on a drink.

“Will,” Hannibal groaned, bucking up again. His head rolled on the pillow, his hair coming free from its artful swoop and sticking to his forehead. Will started fucking him in earnest. They couldn’t quite coordinate well enough to kiss, instead sharing icy and warm breaths between them.

Hannibal was muttering something that Will was reasonably sure wasn’t English, punctuated by sharp barking cries when Will got the angle just right. He wasn’t going to last long, and again embarrassment washed over him. Hannibal picked that moment to press the thumb of one hand into the bite mark on his hip and to grab his ass with the other.

Will sank back into oblivious sensation. He was so close, so close, he just needed...

“Hannibal,” Will panted, “Hannibal please,”

Hannibal’s head had lolled back on the pillow, his sharp chin up and the lines of his jaw shining white in the candlelight. He focused on Will with apparent difficulty.

“Bite me,” Will asked, “god, please, bite me,”

Hannibal curled up and clamped his teeth around the point of Will's shoulder and Will came, screaming mortifyingly loudly. Hannibal grabbed his hand and guided it to Hannibal's cock. A few pulls and the man (ghost?) came too, arms wrapped vice like around Will's shoulders.

Will rolled off Hannibal, but Hannibal's grip was so tight that he rolled too, and they were left lying on their sides, forehead to forehead. Hannibal was staring at Will intently, dark eyes flickering relentlessly over Will's face. Will's gaze flickered down to the empty place, the bullet hole, in Hannibal's chest. Hannibal nudged his face with his cheek until Will stopped staring at it.

"It's nice to see you," Will said, repeating himself from earlier. Hannibal's mouth twitched, not quite reaching a smile.

"Is it because you got to eat..." Will trailed off, remembering Soylent Green had come out after Hannibal had died, "...people again?"

"I think so," Hannibal said calmly, "I admit I don't understand much of my existence, certainly not since you've come along, but it seems reasonable."

Will hummed his approval, and though he meant to ask more (there was so much to ask!) his eyelids slipped closed and he fell fast asleep.

-x-

Will woke late in the morning, sunlight streaming into the room pale and bright.

There was no sign of Hannibal. The other side of the coverlet had not been turned up, and Will could find no evidence of another body in the pattern of the sheets.

The candles were still there, but pristine and new: not even a single drip of wax to suggest they had been burning for hours the night before.

Will sat up, feeling sorrow pressing into his ribs. The mirror was spattered with blood where he had killed Steve, but only his pale reflection stared back, nobody else was there. When he at last stopped looking for Hannibal and instead scrutinized himself, he saw a deep bite mark in his shoulder, diagonal to the one on his hip. This one hadn't broken the skin, but each tooth was embossed and tinted by purple bruising.

Will flopped back into the sheets the ache of absence ameliorated by the mark. Will's jeans were streaked with blood and stiff where it had dried, and he grimaced as he pulled them on. The shirt he decided he could live without.

Mercifully, Will had kept his back of clothing in the car when he had left the house yesterday so the idiot teenagers hadn't had a chance to fuck with them. Will expected he'd be looking for his tools for months.

Will grabbed the bag and slung in over his shoulder. He picked up the generator with one hand and the space heater with the other. The morning was freezing cold and Will hadn't borrowed with shoes, the soles of his feet were numb by the time he made it back to the house.

Will got the generator working despite the full body shivers that shook his hands and made his knees knock, then spent a few blissful minutes as close to the space heater as he could get. When he could take full breaths without shivering, he dragged the bag of clothes over too.

With clean jeans on, Will contemplated the bloody pair he had just taken off. It was safest to burn them, but they were a favorite pair and with the money he had been spending on fixing up the house he couldn't afford to replace them right now.

Baking soda and an immaculate job hiding the bodies it would have to be. Fully dressed, that was his next order of business.

Will returned to the car for trash bags and then clattered down to the basement where the scraps and unusable bodies had ended up.

One of the trash bags Will wore as smock while he worked, because the young men had to be cut in half with a wicked bone saw to fit into the bags. Thankfully the girls rolled up nicely. Hilary would have been a problem if Hannibal hadn't taken so much from her torso, she had been so tall.

With the bodies portioned out, Will wrapped them up in saran wrap and put them into the trash bags. Each body had a few pieces from cinder blocks with it. The bags were tied shut, and then retied with wire. The whole thing was wrapped in fencing and then loaded into his car, eleven bags in total. Will intended to stop at eleven separate bodies of water. Will wondered if Hannibal had used this same method because most of the materials had come from the basement.

Will paused by the door of his car, staring at the dark windows of the house. He hated to leave for so long, but it had to be done.

Eight hours later, Will returned home. His route had taken him through Virginia and West Virginia, but all of the bodies had sunk where he left them and were satisfactorily far away from trails and roads, each separated from the others by at least half an hour of travel. Will had changed shoes twice and his outer layer three times, even digging out his father's ancient ball cap for a few. He hadn't seen any people, would never have left the car if he'd seen people, but one never did know.

The house was dark and Will ached to go inside and light a fire, but first he had to get rid of the cars. He grabbed the keys he had looted from the teenagers, and drove them to two separate chop shops, again wearing different clothes and walking to different bus lines afterwards. He walked nearly an hour back to Hannibal's house each time.

It was almost morning when he trudged back through the front door, bone weary but satisfied. He went into the study and lit the fire. Turning to settle into his customary chair, Will startled when he saw Hannibal sitting in the chair opposite, watching him quietly with a mild expression.

"Long day?" Hannibal asked and Will laughed aloud. Abandoning the chair, Will moved to the threadbare patch of rug at Hannibal's feet. Will hadn't had a chance to clean up the house

itself yes, empty beer cans littered the room and he frowned at one of them under Hannibal's chair.

Hannibal turned him until he sat with his back between Hannibal's legs. Hannibal set to kneading the muscles that ran between Will's neck and shoulders and Will tipped his head back between Hannibal's thighs with a groan.

Hannibal was bent over to reach his shoulders, so with his head leaned back, Will and he were nearly face to face. Will expected a kiss, but Hannibal just tipped his forehead to press lightly against Will's and then sat up a little straighter to rub Will's shoulders a little harder.

-x-

The next morning Will woke up in Hannibal's bed with no memory of moving there under his own power. He certainly didn't remember undressing, he thought with a grin.

He still had to scrub the house for fingerprints and dispose of the miscellany, like the beer cans, but he felt he could indulge in a short lie-in with the bodies gone. It was a sunny morning, and a thick sunbeam fell across Will's stomach, the warmth made him feel lazy and liquid.

Hannibal's journal lay on the bedside table and Will reached for it fondly. He felt like it had been a long time since he had visited the Hannibal of years past, even though it had only been a few days.

With a start, he realized it was not in fact the journal he had been reading last, but rather one written a year after, marked 1948. There was a slim bookmark fitted into the journal.

April 4, 1948

Mr. Budge returned today. He was in one of his black moods. His son had come home with a poor maths test and he despaired that anything would become of him. He was certain his family name would die with him.

With the disappearance of the second cellist in the Baltimore Orchestra, Mr. Budge has apparently made quite a name for himself. In his last better mood, he informed me that the NBC Symphony Orchestra was soliciting tryouts from string musicians.

I attempted to remind him of this, but his black moods are all encompassing, and he immediately returned to concern for his son's failure to perform arithmetic. One cannot appreciate music if one does not appreciate math, he informed me, and without either one is scarcely a man.

It's an interesting proposition, certainly.

He is an amusing man, overall, and I suspect I would miss his conversation should he decide to abscond to New York. I saw their concert last night. The first ever televization of Beethoven's Ninth. I wonder if the pressure of performing not just for New York but the Nation would improve Mr. Budge's mood, or ruin it?

Privately I think he wonders this himself.

Will remembered the name Tobias from the last entries he had read about the Budges. With a start, he made the connection. Toby, who went to school with him and who very nearly died along with Fred and Price that first disastrous evening had he not been at a Lovecraft Film Festival with his friend Franklin, was short for Tobias Budge Junior.

“Well,” said Will aloud, “I wonder if Toby knows his family history.” He wondered if Toby played an instrument.

June 1, 1948

Yesterday a dike broke in Oregon, flooding an entire town within minutes. God is surely in a fine mood today.

Mr. Budge has come over again. I asked if he had seen the news and he had, railing against the incompetence of the engineers for several minutes. The tangent seemed to please him. It always takes me a moment to discern which of Mr. Budge's moods I have been graced with on any given day. Today his son is no genius, rather a perpetual disappointment. I am reminded of

The next word is scribbled out. Will frowned at it but read on.

and other children who suffer the adults around them. This world is full of monsters.

September 29, 1948

I have read a study published by Dr. Kinsey. I very much wish I could have read this to Matthew.

Today is a good day. Today deserves a feast.

October 1, 1948

I held my somewhat impromptu feast today. I do not recall inviting Mr. Budge, in fact my notes show his son had a concert at his academy this evening, yet attend Mr. Budge did. He had also brought a fantastically inebriated trombonist with him, a Mr. Boyle.

Thankfully I had made enough extra such that nobody went hungry.

Mr. Budge and Mr. Boyle lingered long after my other guests had left. Mr. Budge apparently wanted to make a formal introduction of Mr. Boyle and he be certain I understood each of his attributes the better to host him at a subsequent dinner.

It was really too forward of Mr. Budge and I told him so. He told me that if I were not careful in the future he might lose his temper, grinning merrily all the while.

October 2, 1948

Mr. Budge apparently did not ensure Mr. Boyle stayed with him last night because he was found dead this morning as a result of crashing his car into a tree. It is obviously a tragic accident, but I shall have to have a word with Mr. Budge on the care and keeping of friends.

October 18, 1948

I again met with Mr. Budge today. His son has been offered an apprenticeship with an extremely well known trumpeter. Mr. Budge told me he always envisioned his son as a strings player like himself but since "that boy" is "finally getting somewhere" he supposed a brass player would do.

October 20, 1948

Mr. Budge learned today that the famous trumpeter in fact plays jazz. He required an emergency appointment and in working through his emotions made quite a mess of the office. He asked for me to have a talk with his son over dinner. I informed him that was quite impossible. In truth it disgusts me that he wishes to discourage his child with such finality. I'm afraid I allowed some of this sentiment through my professional demeanor and I'm not sure Mr. Budge will be returning.

A young man in the army used to tell me "you win some, you lose some, doc." I feel in this case I quite agree.

November 8, 1948

I received a letter in my mailbox today, devoid of stamp or return address. Inside I found a terse note informing me that Mr. Budge has decided to move to New York and will no longer require my services.

Mr. Budge's survival instincts will take him far.

-x-

"I can't believe you didn't kill him," Will said aloud for maybe the fifth time. As ever, there was no response but the blink of the cursor in his word processor. Will fixed the offending line of his thesis silently.

Days had gone by since he had cleaned house, as he now thought of the incident. Each day there were no sirens outside, no banging at the front door, no ringing cell phone he grew more confident, more relaxed. He slept later and ate better.

Hannibal appeared as soon as the sun disappeared beyond the horizon. Will's father had never been one for domesticity, he had told Will that his mother wasn't either, and until now Will could never imagine himself staying in one house with the same person day after day. Until now Will could never imagine not having a drink with dinner, after dinner, after the drink after dinner.

Will got the generator working and had been spending the daylight hours at school and working on his thesis. When he worked at the house, the words seemed to fly from his fingers. Almost as if they were being pulled through him without his creation ever being involved. His repairs on the house had been languishing but Hannibal never seemed to mind. The repairs helped him, he'd told Will, but not nearly as much as eating what he pleased helped him.

The extra meat Will got cleaning house was stored in the cooler which had been moved to the hidden basement beneath the kitchen. The murder room was technically public knowledge

but Will felt better with the cooler there anyway.

Hannibal had been chipping slowly away at the supply, only eating piece every night rather than whole organs the way he had that first incredible night. Will joined him more often than not, typing away on his laptop while Hannibal cooked. The fireplace wasn't an ideal kitchen and Hannibal grumbled good-naturedly as he worked but he said it was worth it to cook again. To eat at the same table with Will.

A few weeks into the semester, the search for the missing teenagers went public. Will read the story in bits and pieces, catching glimpses in gas stations and coffee shops so he wouldn't look too interested. It was all very vague and still no police came to the house. Will determinedly focused on the thesis.

Then, one weekend afternoon, Will was working in the study. It was unseasonably warm and he had opened one of the tall windows to the sunny spring air. His thesis was undergoing its last drafts and his supervising professor had begun to take real interest. She was pressing him to apply for the school's master's programs in psychology and criminology.

Will finished a paragraph and saved the document. He leaned back on his hands, staring up at the shadowed ceiling to rest his computer-tired eyes, and suddenly he heard a voice at the window.

"Will, do you know what happened to those teenagers that went missing?" Bedelia stood at the open window to the study, regarding Will on the floor surrounded by journals. She was backlit by the afternoon sun and any expression on her face was rendered indiscernible by shadow.

"What teenagers," asked Will flatly, "Bedelia I've been nose deep in thesis: the only events I know about these days happened before 1950."

"Don't lie to me Will," Bedelia whispered, hunching over. Will heard her suck in a few shuddering breaths.

The meat was running low, Will thought.

"I'm not lying to you Bedelia." He said calmly. The tilt of her head told him she was watching him with suspicion.

After a long pause she said "you look better. Like you've been eating well."

"Hannibal insists." Will told her frankly. She wasn't leaving here and couldn't tell anyone.

"And what does ...Hannibal insist that you eat?" she asked coolly.

"One time he kicked me out because I was eating Captain Crunch at four in the morning," Will lied smoothly, slipping into his most charming expression. He slid from his sitting position into a supine recline with his knees up, consciously displaying casual vulnerability. Right on cue, Bedelia swung one leg over the windowsill and sat.

“He kicked you out?” her tone was uncertain; like someone not sure if the person they were addressing was about to punch them or burst out laughing.

“Yeah, I just went to school really early,” Will agreed laughing. “Brought a bunch of carrots and shit back with me when I came back.”

“Can you really keep fresh food here?” Bedelia asked and for a minute Will wanted to strangle her. He could probably catch her before she got far. Then he made himself relax because he remembered he wasn’t actually lying. Most of his food was admittedly dry and canned goods without a refrigerator but Will did bring fresh things back on request. There was a fresh eggplant and several parsnips in the kitchen now.

“I have a cooler,” Will agreed, but it had taken him too long and Bedelia was unsettled again, “there’s a lot of canned stuff too but it’s better than the crap I used to eat,” he laughed again, this time pitching it to self-deprecation, “or I guess the crap I didn’t eat.”

“What’s that?” Bedelia asked, clipped and cold again. Will glanced down and saw the Ouija planchette had slipped out of the neck of his shirt.

“Best way to talk with him,” he said quietly.

“A Ouija board? Seriously?” she exclaimed, incredulous.

“I’m careful,” Will assured her, carefully neutral. “I always ask for Hannibal in particular and say goodbye when we’re done.” Although he thought, that folk wisdom clearly wasn’t completely efficacious. Hannibal had no problem dragging the planchette around without so much as a how do you do.

“The house looks nice,” Bedelia said awkwardly.

“Thanks.”

“Do you ever see Price? Or Freddie?” she blurted out.

“No,” Will said but then he wondered why. Despite Hannibal passing as a flesh and blood human after dark he had never heard so much as a whisper from the other people who had died here. Not Freddie, not Price, and not Belle, Constance, Matty, Justin, Steve, or Tyler. He wondered if Hannibal had gotten to eat them all over again. Maybe livers were even better on the other side.

Bedelia was talking again and Will tuned back in belatedly.

“Will you know I believe you about the ghost,” she was saying, “but I think you need help, I really, really think you need help.” He wondered if she was convincing him or herself.

“Because I’ve put on weight and am set to complete undergraduate college at the top of my major?” He sat up to look at her. She was standing again, out on the porch with her knees flush with the windowsill.

“Will you watched two of your friends die and then promptly moved into the crime scene and nobody else has seen you for actual, factual weeks,” she paused to draw breath.

He needed her closer to him, she was going to pull out her (new) phone and ruin everything all over again any second now. He hunched over, eyes to the curve of his knees, and did his best impression of crying. As he sank further into the pantomime, real tears of anger and frustration began to well up and his breath hitched and wheezed.

“Oh, Will,” Bedelia murmured. Will knew without watching her that she had stepped into the room and was wavering on whether to come closer. It was all the edge he needed, it wasn’t only fatty weight he had been putting on but muscle too. She didn’t even have time to scream before he leaped at her, following her body over the windowsill and slamming her head into the boards of the porch.

-x-

Will tied her to the table in the basement. If Hannibal wanted the meat he would want it fresh.

Then he waited.

He couldn’t make himself go back to the sitting down and thinking work of his thesis, so he worked on the house. The door to the linen room upstairs had become uneven as the old frame warped and Will got it off the hinges and got to work on a new frame.

When he was testing the swing of the new door with his level, he felt the air behind him go cold and then the weird empty sensation, like the air immediately behind him had disappeared and an impromptu wind had kicked up to replace it. A hand came to rest at his elbow and he turned, smiling, to come face to face with Hannibal.

Hannibal pressed a kiss to his lips and smiled. “We have a guest, I see.”

“Her last visit, unfortunately,” Will agreed, “I was hoping you could give some advice on the going-away party.” He leaned into Hannibal’s chest, taking comfort in the solid presence of him being really actually there. He had been this way for weeks already, but Will never tired of reassuring himself.

“I think this particular situation offers and opportunity if you will indulge me,” Hannibal said fondly.

“What do you want me to do,” Will murmured against the point of his cheekbones. He felt Hannibal’s skin pull into a grin against his lips. Hannibal told him.

-x-

The cinder blocks went quickly, grinding against each other as Will hefted each one into place. He noted absently that he had mixed up too much of the mortar, he supposed if he finished quickly enough he could do some work on the sagging porch.

“What are you doing?” Bedelia slurred, wincing against the pain in her head.

“C’mon Bedelia,” Will said, focus more on the mortar than on her, “you’ve read Poe before, I know you have.”

That got her attention and she struggled with a little more effort, trying to find enough of a gap in her bindings to sit up straight.

“My god,” she slurred, “my god, help me, save me from this, I can’t die now I’m getting married,” she trailed off as the head injury again prevailed and her head lolled down toward her chest. Will slid another cinder block into place.

“How can you do this to me?” Bedelia asked when she came back around, “bury me alone in a basement? You won’t even kill me?”

“You won’t be alone,” Will promised. Bedelia went white and fell silent again.

She didn’t say anything else as he worked, dissolving into sobbing towards the end.

When Will pressed the last cinder block into the mortar, he couldn’t hear anything at all.

-x-

Hannibal was waiting upstairs when he came upstairs. “Wash your hands and change please,” he told Will amiably. Will trotted outside. Bedelia’s motorcycle was parked off the road and he started it up and drove it behind the house to the ledge beyond the cliff. He had snapped the old lock off the gate during his clean up after the break in and replaced it with a fresh deadbolt. It would be suspicious, he knew, but well worth it. He only opened it while wearing gloves, just in case.

With the bike hidden inside the tunnel, Will trotted back to his car and used the gallon jug in the trunk to wash his hands. Hannibal had quit complaining about him wearing jeans to the dinner table after the first few arguments, so Will slipped on a fresh pair. He felt it wasn’t an unreasonable thing to insist upon. Will swung a fresh shirt on, not bothering to button it before he locked the car and went back inside.

Hannibal froze for a whole second when he appeared in the kitchen and Will smiled smugly before buttoning the shirt. Hannibal raised his brows in response and set back to his plating with an expression that promised retaliation later.

Hannibal served Will at the dinner table, as he always did, introducing it as “flank” in a cherry wine sauce. He had started experimenting with non-alcoholic beverage pairings to his food and Will understood why he had been sent out to harvest lavender for an hour when he was presented with a honey lavender lemonade. It was, of course, excellent, even if he had to make more of an effort than usual to focus on his food instead of his dining companion. Will insisted on jeans so Hannibal insisted on proper attention to his food, an eminently reasonable request to Will’s mind.

With dinner finished, Will washed the dishes at breakneck speed the better to herd an enthusiastically compliant Hannibal up the stairs to the bedroom.

He couldn't stop smiling.

-x-

Will was just dozing off when he heard a sharp banging at the door. He rose, he still felt too sloppy for jeans so he pulled the flat sheet around his waist. Hannibal had already risen though where he had gone was anyone's guess. Will hadn't seen him vanish in this new, solid form, but was more than willing to believe anything of paranormal physics.

It was probably Alana, he thought, and wondered if the mortar was still wet enough to excise a small door section. He could go in through the floor above if he had to but repairing the hole to be invisible would be annoying. He was at the top of the stairs when the banging came again and a female voice called out: "Baltimore PD, answer the door Mr. Graham."

Will paused but couldn't see any better way out of this mess than cooperation. He continued down the stairs and opened the door. A police car was parked facing the door and it momentarily blinded him after the dim light of the blue candle flames in the dark house. He brought up an arm to shield his eyes and could make out two officers staring with professionally blank expressions.

"What's this about?" Will asked, knowing it was too late to spin any kind of excuse as to why he was in Lecter's house, not least because he was standing in the hall naked but for a sheet around his waist.

"Mr. Graham, we have a warrant for your arrest."

End Notes

First and foremost, thank you for reading this thing I have read. Second, I have no beta so if you spot a vexing anomaly with the spelling, grammar, continuity, history, formatting, tagging, or really anything, please do tell me. I welcome any and all feedback as well as commentary of any kind including but not limited to your favorite drawbridge, your least favorite pastry, and the most overrated song on the charts. Thank you again for reading and may I just say if I could actually roast kudos and eat them I would have them for breakfast lunch dinner and dessert.

There will be a fourth part! It is titled Shigenaga's helmet and is a few thousand words in. I wish I could tell you it will come sooner than this one did...but I can't promise that in good faith. But it will be eventually!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!